How to keep Fit

By

A Family Doctor.

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BY A FAMILY DOCTOR.

"TIME is Money" is a maxim that has often been quoted with approval, but speaking for myself as a doctor, I must claim precedence for another saying—"Health is Money." This old saying was at no period of History more true than it is to-day, when the rush and tear of modern civilisation put so heavy a strain on the brain and nervous system. A man reckoning up his assets and calculating the value of his stock in hand, his premises and his banking account, will make a great mistake if he omits the state of his health from his balance sheet.

CULPABLE NEGLIGENCE.

And yet, Health is too often neglected. At a very early stage in his career, a doctor discovers that a large percentage of his patients are ill from preventable causes; a very little more care would save much time, money and pain. The cause of health has had a great set-back by reason of the absurdities of valetudinarians; a man who looks after his health is in danger of being termed a molly-coddle and a good

deal of not undeserved ridicule has been thrown at a man who travels to London and works his way up one side of Harley Street and down the other consulting all the Specialists in turn.

GUARD YOUR HEALTH.

But the reckless expenditure of valuable health is a greater crime than spending needless fees on imaginary illnesses. I like to see a healthy middle-aged father making his young son work hard to beat him at tennis and thoroughly annoying the said son by winning the swimming race at the baths. Surely there can be no hesitation in deciding which is the happier, the young man of sixty or the old man of forty. Let us take our courage in both hands and refuse to grow old. I think I can help you if you will read these few hints on how to keep fit. We all begin the day by getting up, at least that is the theory; in practice, we stay in bed too long and thereby hangs a tale. The hurried dressing, the gobbled breakfast, the rush to the train are responsible for many an attack of indigestion and even for many an ulcer in the stomach.

GET UP EARLY.

I could write a book on getting up in the morning. Rise at seven and breakfast at eight. Spend a little time in keeping the muscles fit and, if you are anywhere near forty, look especially after the abdominal muscles. Take a glance at any book on Drawing or Surface Anatomy and you will observe that the walls

of the abdomen are made of muscle. This muscle is exactly the same as the muscles of the limbs, such as Biceps, only it is spread out in sheets. Once let these muscles get flabby, fatty and lax and you will present the well-known appearance so dear to Aldermen and so repulsive to the aesthetic eye. The exercises proved by experience to be of the greatest value are as follows:—Lie on the back and raise the toes in the air with the knees straight. You will find it easier as you practice day by day and you may repeat the exercise an increasing number of times. The other exercise is to place the feet under some such object as a chest of drawers so as to give some support and purchase in raising the body from the lying-down posture to the sitting posture. And in going about one's daily task, a conscious effort should be made to keep the stomach in, as the drill-sergeants say.

BREATHING EXERCISES.

Do not omit the breathing exercises and carry them out near an open window. Practise breathing through the nose; if this is found to be impossible, there is probably some obstruction in the way of enlarged bones or perhaps a polypus which obstructs the air-passage. In the performance of all the exercises for the muscles, it is only necessary to keep them reasonably hard. I have no sort of sympathy with those advertisements showing men with muscles like legs of mutton all over their arms and legs. No one wants such muscles as that, except perhaps the

Strong Man who earns his living by lifting a grand piano with his teeth for the delectation of the music-hall audience. The strain put upon the heart in cultivating useless lumps of muscle must counteract any benefit that might be derived from the exercise. No, I only ask for ten minutes spent at the open window in exercising all the muscles, especially the breathing muscles, and most particular of all, the abdominal muscles, for exercises directed to these latter also stir up the liver and intestines. If the morning cup of tea is to be drunk, the teeth should be cleaned first; do not wash your mouth with the tea that is swallowed. The tooth-brush should be fairly soft and the brush should be worked up and down as well as from side to side so as to penetrate into the crevices between the teeth. Do not keep the tooth brush too long; it should be scrapped before it gets grimy with old age.

DRINK PLENTY OF WATER.

It is a good thing to drink plenty of water between meals. If you come to think of it, the body contains quite a lot of water. A desiccated mummy looks a very poor thing; a magician who could restore the water to the mummy's flesh would materially improve its appearance. Strange what a lot can be done by the most simple expedients. The body needs large quantities of water and an almost instant improvement in health can be brought about by drinking plenty of water. Girls are the worst offenders in this respect; they drink very little and what they do

take is generally tea, more or less stewed and full of tannin. It may be noted that milk, the ideal food provided by Nature for the rapidly growing child, is nearly all water.

MASTICATE CAREFULLY.

The body, having fasted for several hours, is in good condition to breakfast in the morning. A solid breakfast eaten with appetite is one of the best signs of good health. Conversely, the feeling following the night before is too well known to be emphasised! If Stomachs could speak they would find the fiercest, and most legitimate grumble in protesting against the gobbled, ill-masticated and ill-digested breakfast. No bottle of digestive mixture ever invented can act as a substitute for a carefully eaten meal. You probably know that the process of digestion consists in liquefying the food so that it can be transported in the blood-stream to every part of the body. It is true that the bacon and eggs do reach your brain, but not as bacon and eggs. If you do not chew up your bacon the juices have no chance in their efforts to dissolve the food; the lumps lie fermenting in the dilated stomach, which is reduced to despair.

KEEP REGULAR HABITS.

Perhaps the chief reason for rising early is to allow time for the regular visit to the lavatory. One of the first rules of Physiology is that the body is subject to Regularity. The heart beats in measured regularity; the temperature is measured with accuracy

and it rises and falls, night and morning, as regularly as clockwork. The body appreciates regularity as much as an old Bank Manager who regards punctuality as one of the prime virtues. The evacuation of the bowels is partly under the control of the nervous system and there is no room for doubt that the nervous system likes to work with regularity. Take sleep as an example. If I am called out of bed at two in the morning and get back at three, I frequently lie awake, not because my brain is not tired but because its wonted routine has been disturbed. It is becoming a well-recognised rule for midwives to try to train the tiny babies to regularity in their habits; it is impossible to begin too early. School doctors insist that time should be given for the all important operations of nature before school in the morning. The beginnings of constipation are founded when the regularity of habit is broken. In learning how to keep fit, the word "regularity" should occur frequently.

THE BLESSINGS OF SHOE LEATHER.

Before starting for business, most of us put on our boots and here we have a fruitful subject of contemplation. Boots form one of the blessings of civilisation. Savages do not enjoy the happy privilege. We can, therefore, boast of many advantages over the Savage and I must enumerate them. Corns, bunions, abscesses, hammer toe, crowded toes, in-growing toe-nails, and flat feet are some of the "blessings." Bad temper, especially at the end of a tiring day, may be aggravated by

uncomfortable boots. Boys are, sad to relate, often made to wear boots that are too small for them; the growing feet outstrip the boots which are not yet worn out. The examination of the feet of recruits for the Great War revealed a shocking state of things. Please take a look at a baby's foot to see how the toes should be arranged and, when next you visit a Museum, glance at the feet of the Grecian statues. If anyone wishes for an example of self-inflicted disability, let him think of boots!

The well formed boot should be straight along the inner border to allow the big toe room; the pointed shapes which press the big toe over the top of the second toe are monstrosities.

PREVENTABLE STOMACH TROUBLES.

As our strength is derived from the food we eat, it is not necessary for me to dwell on the importance of meals. Our old friend "regularity" comes in here with redoubled force. No reasonable man or woman should subject the stomach to the indignity of irregular meals. It is cruelty, and to be cruel to one's own stomach is even more ridiculous than cutting off one's nose to spite one's face. I see the gloomy side of life. Walk into any hospital and you will see bed after bed filled by folk suffering from diseases of the stomach. And everyone of them might have been prevented. Dame Nature is kind if treated with respect, but she can be very stern. Say to her "I am very sorry my work prevents me from having regular meals," and she will reply, "I am very sorry I

cannot prevent you from having an ulcer of the stomach.'' I boldly take up the stand that a doctor's work is to prevent illness. I protest against the view that a doctor should hold his tongue until he is called in to a sick man. I know that I can empty half the beds in the hospitals if I can persuade my friends to take more care of their stomachs and I intend to carry on the good work however discouraged I may be by the failure to convince my hearers.

I find that a large number of clerks and typists who live some way from their work have too long an interval between their scrappy breakfast and their mid-day meal. These office girls would be healthier if they had a glass of milk, perhaps with an egg beaten up in it, or a couple of oatmeal biscuits, at eleven. The everlasting office tea should be condemned; there is no substance in tea to support a girl who is doing a hard day's work.

CARE OF TEETH.

When I set out to write this short treatise on how to keep fit, I should have been quite justified in writing the whole article on Teeth. It cannot be denied that bad teeth are at the bottom of many illnesses.

The English Nation has its good points, but it deserves a very bad mark for its teeth. Savages and primitive races have better teeth than the English. It is true that we are rather ashamed of it, that we are making strenuous efforts to persuade

the school children to have their teeth put in order. The present generation must be allowed to die out with all their foul teeth, inflamed gums, unpleasant breath, abscesses of the jaw, gastric ulcers, cancer of the tongue and all the rest of it. But let a brighter dawn appear for the coming generations. There is one way, and one way only to keep the mouth sweet and clean and pure. You must go to the dentist once in six months whether you feel pain or not and ask him to make sure that everything is all right. He may find a small speck of decay which is soon put right. But wait, as most of you do, for five or six years and that speck has penetrated to the tender pulp in the centre and pain, loss of sleep, loss of temper and perhaps an abscess of the jaw result. Sound teeth are worth a good deal more than their weight in gold. Look after the children's teeth. If you are a man worthy of the name, you will not allow your own dear little daughter to suffer the pangs of toothache. (N.B.—There is scarcely a child in England with a sound set of teeth). Public opinion is lax on the point. A man who would be ashamed to appear with a dirty collar or a dirty face or dirty boots, feels no compunction about appearing in public with dirty teeth. The teeth are part of the digestive apparatus and indigestion is often most successfully treated by attention to the teeth.

OUTDOOR RECREATION.

Everyone should cultivate some form of outdoor recreation. The choice of the game must depend on

the age, sex and inclinations of the individual. Some game can be found for each one, whether it be rugby football or croquet. The aim is to give the muscles enough work to make them pleasantly tired without undue exhaustion. Parents should be careful to watch the competitive efforts of their offspring. A child anxious to outdo a rival struggles on until he receives some strain. In a given team, the weakest cannot keep up the pace of the strongest. Cross-country running is not suited to all constitutions. Swimming is an exercise I always recommend. It exercises all the muscles; it cleans the skin; it dismisses fear of the water and may be the means of saving life. I like to see the whole family going bathing either at the seaside or at the swimming baths.

LIFT UP YOUR VOICES.

I am also in the habit of recommending Singing as a most useful adjunct to Health culture. All young people should be taught singing and when they leave school they should join a choir or choral society. Singing develops the lungs, freshens the blood, teaches a correct carriage of the head and shoulders and may conceivably give pleasure to others. I may sometimes be blamed by the neighbours for my advice, but that does not disturb me. I know that singing is healthy and I encourage it as much as I can. It often happens that the first lesson in deep breathing gives the pupil a headache and that only

shows that he did not know how to breathe properly. Singing lessons also encourage breathing through the nose. Mouth breathing is the cause of coughs and colds.

THE NASAL FILTER.

It is not generally known that noses were given us to breathe through. The air is warmed and filtered when passing through the nasal cavity. Walk out in a fog and keep your mouth shut, allowing all the intake of air to pass through the nose. Then use your handkerchief and you will receive a demonstration of how the nose acts in catching the blacks and filtering the air.

TAKE A DAY OFF.

In times like the present where life is one long rush, a most valuable form of treatment is to take a day off and spend it in bed. Simple forms of treatment are not always popular. A great many patients demand something with electricity and blue sparks in it; they love blue sparks; they feel that if blue sparks will not cure them nothing will. And they cheerfully pay ten guineas. But such a simple suggestion as a day in bed is very much more efficacious than sparks. It rests the spine, it rests the brain, it rests the heart, it rests the temper; if meals are taken in quiet and comfort, it rests the digestive organs. A day in bed is a splendid tonic to a weary worker.

HEALTH IS MONEY.

I began these few hints with the saying that 'Health is Money'; but I should like to end on a higher note. The maintenance of health is a sacred duty. A man may say that his health is his own and he can do what he likes with it, but there never was a more selfish saying; his health was given him so that he might do useful work in the world. He must not occupy a bed in a hospital; he must be one of those to contribute to the upkeep of the hospital. And what of future generations? Health is hereditary, and no man dare say that his children's health is his own and he can do what he likes with it! We who are alive to-day are the trustees of posterity. We have no right to hand on impaired health to descendants yet unborn. It is pitiful to see the weakly son of a weakly father. Health of body can never be dissociated from health of mind; the two go hand in hand. We ought to receive inspiration from the thought that future generations, yet unborn, may live to bless us for the priceless gift of health or to condemn us for our neglect of one of the prime duties of life.

Specially written for and Published by the Proprietors of
ANDREWS LIVER SALT.

Printed by ANDREW REID & Co., Ltd., Newcastle-upon-Tyne.